
FREEDOM TOWER

600 BISCAYNE BOULEVARD

Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI PLANNING DEPARTMENT
TO THE HERITAGE CONSERVATION BOARD
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF
FREEDOM TOWER
600 BISCAYNE BOULEVARD
AS A HERITAGE CONSERVATION ZONING DISTRICT

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	Historic Preservation	Date
	Consultant	
Accepted by	<u>Charles E. Chase</u>	<u>10/26/82</u>
	Chairman, Heritage	Date
	Conservation Board	
Designated by Miami City Commission		
	Ordinance No. <u>9556</u>	
	Date <u>1/13/83</u>	

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Miami Daily News Tower

Current Name:

Freedom Tower

Location:

600 Biscayne Boulevard
Miami, Florida

Present Owner:

Venture Development Corporation
1212 City National Bank Building
Miami, Florida 33130

Present Occupant:

Vacant

Present Use:

Vacant

Present Zoning District:

C-3

HC Zoning Overlay District:

HC-1

Boundary Description of HC Zoning District:

The easterly 14.62 feet of lot 13 and all of lot 14, of Block 60N of the plat of SUBDIVISION OF SOUTH HALF OF BLOCKS 59N AND 60N, as recorded in Plat Book 1 at Page 185, of the Public Records of Dade County, Florida. It is the intent of this description that it include only a portion of the building known as Freedom Tower, more particularly described as the three story rectangular base of the said

building, the fourteen story tower rising from it, and the paved entrance area bounded by the concrete wall to the east of the said building.

HC Zoning Classification:

Historic Site

Dade County Historic Survey Rating:

Architectural Significance	- 1
Historical Significance	- 1
Contextural Significance	- 1

FREEDOM TOWER

600 BISCAYNE BOULEVARD



location



site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Statement of Significance:

Freedom Tower, a landmark on the Miami skyline, is significant as a reflection of urban development in the City during the 1920s and 1960s. In addition, the building, designed by a prominent architectural firm, is an excellent example of Spanish Renaissance Revival style architecture and is particularly noteworthy for the excellence of its design, craftsmanship, and detailing.

The construction of Freedom Tower (Miami Daily News Tower) in 1925 represents the confidence of early business enterprises in Miami's future during the boom years and the tower stands today as perhaps the most conspicuous and dramatic monument to this era. Built to house Miami's first newspaper, the tower is also significant for its role in the history of journalism in the City.

Freedom Tower also reflects the development of Miami during the 1960s when hundreds of thousands of Cuban refugees passed through its doors. The tower is a symbol of freedom for the Cuban community and is a "southern Statue of Liberty."

In addition to its historical significance, Freedom Tower is also an excellent example of Spanish Renaissance Revival style architecture. Inspired by the Giralda Tower in Seville, Spain, the building was designed by the nationally-known firm of Schultze and Weaver and is noted for its well-executed design, elaborate detailing, and outstanding craftsmanship.

Freedom Tower stands today as one of the most impressive landmarks on the Miami skyline. Frequently referred to as Miami's "symbol," "beacon," or "lighthouse," Freedom Tower sits on a direct axis with Government Cut and, as such, is the first downtown building visitors see as they sail into the port.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

Freedom Tower is eligible for designation under the following criteria:

1. Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community.

Freedom Tower is a reflection of urban growth and development in Miami during the period of the 1920s and 1960s. The construction of this building represents the confidence of early business enterprises, in this case, the City's first newspaper, in Miami's future. In addition, the building is a symbol of freedom for Cuban refugees and is the one structure most closely associated with that period of Miami's development.

2. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.

Freedom Tower is an excellent example of Spanish Renaissance Revival style architecture and is particularly noteworthy for its three part composition, octagonal cupola, elaborate entrance, and ornate low-relief carvings.

3. Is an outstanding work of a prominent designer or builder.

Freedom Tower was designed by the nationally-known firm of Schultze and Weaver, who also designed the Miami-Biltmore Hotel and Country Club in Coral Gables and the Roney-Plaza on Miami Beach.

4. Contains elements of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship of outstanding quality or which represent a significant innovation or adaptation to the South Florida environment.

Freedom Tower is particularly noteworthy for the excellence of its design, craftsmanship, and detailing, embodied in such features as its Spanish baroque decoration, elaborate frontispiece, and octagonal tower.

5. Because of its prominence or spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, is an easily identifiable visual feature of a neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or the city.

Freedom Tower stands as one of the most impressive monuments on the Miami skyline and is the first downtown building visitors see as they sail into the port.

III. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Date of Erection:

1924-1925

Architect:

Architects for Freedom Tower were Schultze and Weaver of New York City. S. Fullerton Weaver and Leonard Schultze formed their partnership in 1921 and designed such buildings as the Los Angeles Biltmore, the Atlanta Biltmore, the Miami-Biltmore Hotel and Country Club in Coral Gables, and the Roney-Plaza on Miami Beach.

Builder/Contractor:

The general contractor for Freedom Tower was George A. Fuller of New York.

Historical Context:

Freedom Tower, originally called the Miami Daily News Tower, was constructed in 1924-1925 to house the offices and printing plant of the Miami Daily News and Metropolis, Miami's oldest newspaper. This paper had begun publication one month after the City was incorporated in 1896 and was known as the Miami Metropolis.

The construction of the new office building was instigated by James M. Cox, a former governor of Ohio and the Democratic candidate for the U.S. Presidency in 1920. Cox had purchased the Miami Metropolis in 1923. When the building was officially opened on July 26, 1925, the Miami Daily News and Metropolis published the largest newspaper ever printed, a 504 page edition weighing seven and one-half pounds.

The newspaper occupied the tower until 1957, when a new plant was constructed. The building was subsequently leased by the General Services Administration in 1962 for use as the Cuban Refugee Tower and was renamed "Freedom Tower." Hundreds of thousands of refugees, fleeing from Fidel Castro's Cuba, were processed at Freedom Tower between 1962 and 1974. During this period, the tower became a symbol of freedom.

The Center was closed in 1974, and the building has remained virtually vacant since that time. Freedom Tower is now the focal point of a \$170 million redevelopment project.

IV. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Description of Building:

Freedom Tower's massing consists of a rectangular three story base with a reinforced concrete frame, from which rises a twelve story, steel frame tower. The tower is capped by a two story cupola. Exterior walls are of concrete block, faced in pink stucco. A composition of native stone cast and colored to imitate travertine marble is used for ornamental details.

The east (front) façade is divided into three bays of four colossal, paneled pilasters with shallow quoins. The two central pilasters flank the frontispiece and serve as the visual support from which the tower rises. A molded travertine water table defines the basement story, while a similar molded belt course defines the sill line and bases of the shallow balconies of the piano nobile above.

The frontispiece is defined by two composite, travertine columns which support a large, bold swan's neck pediment. Below this pediment, a tall, round arched opening, with foliated scroll spandrels and an elaborate escutcheon resting on a projecting keystone, forms the main entrance.

Windows were originally two over two wooden double-hung sash, but were replaced with aluminum awning sash in 1951.

The tower is three bays wide and three bays deep with a two story setback at the upper level. This setback is surrounded by a paneled parapet and features four corner pavilions. A tall, slender, octagonal cupola rises from the tower and is topped by a belvedere and dome roof.

Freedom Tower has remained relatively unaltered since its construction, although some decorative features have been removed. The building is presently vacant but is scheduled for rehabilitation.

Description of Site:

Freedom Tower faces east and fronts directly on Biscayne Boulevard and N.E. 6th Street. Railroad tracks are located directly north of the building.



Freedom Tower
600 Biscayne Boulevard
South and east facades
1982

V. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

Freedom Tower has stood virtually empty since 1974 when it was vacated by the Cuban Refugee Center. Although several reuse proposals for the building were advanced, including a Cuban museum, cultural and trade center, none was realized, and the continued preservation of the building was often in doubt.

Freedom Tower, however, was acquired by Venture Development Corporation in 1980, and when the developers requested a zoning change from C-4 to C-3, they agreed to proffer a covenant binding them to preserving the building. The current proposal for the property is known as Freedom Tower Plaza and calls for a glass-enclosed 69-story tower behind the historic building. This \$170-million project is scheduled to start in 1983 and includes a Hilton Hotel with 500 rooms and 529 condominium apartments.

Conservation Objectives:

Continued preservation of Freedom Tower should remain a priority in this or any future redevelopment project for the site. Furthermore, any new building constructed behind Freedom Tower should respect the architectural character of the historic structure. The lobby of Freedom Tower should remain a public space, and consideration should be given to providing interpretive displays.

These conservation objectives can best be achieved by maintaining the present zoning of the property. An HC-1 zoning overlay district will maintain the current zoning, requiring only the review of physical changes to the property.

VI. HC ZONING ELEMENTS

Boundaries:

The boundaries of the HC zoning district have been drawn to include only a portion of the original Freedom Tower building and exclude the rectangular three to five story mass behind the main body of the building. The determination not to include the entire tract of land owned by Venture Development Corporation was based on the decision by the Heritage Conservation Board to maintain the boundaries of the Interim Heritage Conservation Zoning District which had been established in October 1981. This decision to include only part of a building should not be construed as a precedent-setting case, but rather as the "grandfathering" of a previous action.

Major Exterior Surfaces Subject to Review:

All four facades of Freedom Tower shall be considered major exterior surfaces subject to review.

Major Landscape Features Subject to Review:

The major landscape features subject to review shall include all features which are subject to requirements for tree removal permits, as set forth in Chapter 17 of the City Code.

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arguelles, Maria T. "Freedom Tower." Unpublished Research Report, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida, 1979.

Dade County, Florida. Community and Economic Development, Historic Conservation Division. Dade County Historic Survey, Site Inventory File for 600 Biscayne Boulevard, Miami, Florida.

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